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By BENJAMIN WELLES

WASHINGTON.

CAN tell when he walks in the door what sort of a day it's been," says his wife, Cynthia. "Some days he has on what I call his 'Oriental look'—totally inscrutable. I know better than to ask what's happened. He'll talk when he's ready, not before, but even when he talks he's terribly discreet."

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Richard Helms, apparently brings his problems home from the office like any other husband—at least to hear Cynthia Helms tell it. And these days Helms's job is definitely one of the most problem-ridden in Washington.

Successive budget cuts, balance of payments restrictions, bureaucratic rivalries and press disclosures that have hurt the C.I.A.'s public image have all reduced its operations considerably. President Nixon has recently ordered a fiscal and management investigation into the intelligence "community," a task which may take longer and prove more difficult than even Helms suspects because of the capacity of the intelligence agencies to hide in the bureaucratic thickets. Both Nixon and his principal foreign affairs adviser,

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Henry Kissinger, are said to regard the community as a mixed blessing: intrinsically important to the United States but far too big and too prone to obscure differences of opinion—or, sometimes, no opinion—behind a screen of words.

Considered a cold-blooded necessity in the Cold War days, the agency now seems to many students, liberal intellectuals and Congressmen, to be undemocratic, conspiratorial, sinister. The revelations in recent years that have made the agency suspect include its activities in Southeast Asia, the Congo, Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs; the U-2 flights; its secret funding through "front" foundations of the National Student Association plus private cultural, women's and lawyers' groups, and, finally, two years ago, the Green Berets affair.

The 58-year-old Helms, born in this, better than most. As the first career intelligence officer to reach the

top since the C.I.A. was created in 1947, his goal has been to professionalize the agency and restore it to respectability. In fact, one of his chief preoccupations has been to erase the image of the Director as a man who moves in lavish mystery, jettisoning secretively around the world to make policy with prime ministers, generals and kings, and brushing aside, on the pretext of "security," the public's vague fears and Congress's probing questions. If Helms rules an "invisible empire," as the C.I.A. has sometimes been called, he is a very visible emperor.

While he tries to keep his lunches free for work, for example, he occasionally shows up at a restaurant with a friend for lunch: a light beer, a cold plate, one eye always on the clock. He prefers the Occidental, a tourist-frequented restaurant near the White House where, if he happens to be seen, there is likely to be less gossip than if he were observed entering a private home.

He likes the company of attractive women—young or old—and they find him a charming dinner partner and a good dancer.

"He's interesting—and interested in what you're saying," said Lydia Katzenbach, wife of the former Democratic Attorney General. "He's well-read and he doesn't try to substitute flirting for conversation, that old Princeton '43 routine that some of the columnists around town use."

Some of his critics complain that he is too close to the press—even though most agree that he uses it, with rare finesse, for his own and his agency's ends. Some dislike the frequent mention of Helms and his handsome wife in the gossip columns and society pages of the nation's capital.

Yet, if he gives the appearance of insouciance—he is witty, gregarious, friendly—the reserve is there, like a high-voltage electric barrier, just beneath the surface. Helms is a man of apparent contradictions: inwardly self-disciplined and outwardly relaxed, absorbed in the essential yet fascinated by the trivial. A former foreign correspondent, he observes much and can recall precisely what few Americans do. He is a man who knows the first place—what gown each woman wore to a dinner and whose shoulder strap

Appraising Mideast Intelligence

By MILES COPELAND

LONDON—For reasons comprehensible only to those who have worked in a diplomatic service, no government can afford to keep its public fully informed on what it does in the field of international relations. Sometimes it must conceal the reasons for its actions, and sometimes the actions themselves. In some rare instances, it must pretend to be taking one set of actions while actually taking another, and to present the public with a largely fictional picture of what it is doing and why.

This is especially true when our State Department comes up against a problem such as the Arab-Israel conflict. A diplomat newly assigned to this particular problem finds himself in the possession of "estimates of the situation" provided by the C.I.A., the Pentagon, and embassies reporting from Israel and the Arab countries; then he begins to feel pressures from "domestic considerations" which bend him and his colleagues toward policies other than those which the "estimates of the situation" would clearly dictate. Finally, he tries to devise solutions which make sense in the light of the intelligence estimates, and which can be justified by explanations which have no relation to the estimate but which accommodate to the domestic considerations.

For example:

1. Our intelligence estimators present frightening information concerning the Soviet build-up in Egypt, the increasing Soviet "presence" in the whole Mediterranean area, and the gains of Soviet naval strength east of Suez at the expense of the British. At the same time, they suggest, first, that Soviet gains have not been the result of Soviet actions, but of ours. The more we support Israel, the more the Arabs and their Afro-Asian friends welcome the Soviets. Second, the Soviet build-up is not in preparation for conquest—the Soviets would hardly try to gain by fighting what they can gain peacefully.

2. Daily, policy makers of the State Department read newspaper accounts of hawkish statements of Arab leaders: Syria's President proclaims loudly that his Government will "never" accept the existence of Israel; Iraq's President bitterly attacks Egypt's President. The speech in which the Egyptian is

supposed to have shown such tenderness explicitly threatened war unless Israel withdrew "from every inch of Arab territory." And as our diplomats read such accounts they are aware that these are also being read by American opinion makers who take them at face value. At the same time, they know from the Department's own information that the most belligerent sounding Arab governments have in effect made peace with Israel already; such military preparations as these governments are making are strictly for internal purposes.

3. Our own press plays up the Soviet build-up in Egypt, and reports that "hot-headed young officers" are anxious for another round with Israel. Yet our State Department, depending not only on its highly competent diplomatic staff in Cairo but also on information coming from decades-old intelligence penetrations of the Egyptian armed forces, knows full well that Egyptian officers are possibly "fascist" but certainly not Communist, that they have little confidence in Soviet military assistance and don't like their Soviet advisers any more than the Turks and the Iranians like American advisers, that they are ready to fight for Egypt but not for Palestine or for "the Arabs," and that without the irritating presence of the Israelis in Sinai they would lack the motivation or morale to fight anyone at all.

4. Finally, our State Department officials know that Israeli intelligence estimates are roughly the same as our own. Thus, it is inconceivable that Israeli spokesmen could be sincere when they argue that unqualified support to Israel is the only way to halt the growth of Soviet influence in the area, that they are in constant dread of being overrun by the Arabs, and that they must hold on to Sharm el-Sheik as a means of insuring passage through the Strait of Tiran. The Israelis know very well that they can take Sharm el-Sheik any time they wish, no matter who occupies it, and that their presence there will only provoke revival of Egyptian hostilities.

The Egyptians, seeing the Israelis' reluctance to seize this unique opportunity to make peace, suspect that they want a no-war-no-peace situation such as Nasser once wanted, and for similar (domestic) reasons. Apparently some of our NATO friends share the suspicion; so, increasingly, do some of our own diplomats. For good or for bad, right or wrong, and whatever the ultimate effect on purely American interests, we are behind the Israelis one hundred percent. But we must make our own policy in Washington and not let the Israelis make it for us in Tel Aviv. If domestic considerations stand in the way, our diplomats should clear a path for themselves by revealing the path that the Israelis have known all along but have

withheld from the public. Surely the American people will approve of any position which is uncompromising enough in its support of Israel, even though it leaves it to Mrs. Meir to handle her own "domestic considerations."

Miles Copeland is a former high-ranking official of the Central Intelligence Agency and author of "The Game of Nations."